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ABSTRACT

To study the emergence of literacy during the preschool years, a handwritten diary, maintained on a day to day basis, focused on one child, David, from ages two and a half to four and a half. One facet of the study concentrated on his literary language--his incorporation of written texts (children's literature) into his language and background of information in relation to his early socialization into his middle class home and values. From the hundreds of hours of bookreading, David developed a distinct "literary" vocabulary even though he was a nonreader himself. David lifted formulaic phrases from texts and used them in his own play and narrative. He became so familiar with the contents of his books that he often compared words from one text with those of another text or played with the words of texts in a humorous, teasing way. In order to live the lives of his book characters, David role played and dramatized from the texts throughout his natural day of play. In this way he learned multiple meanings of words, refined meanings of others, built a "literary" vocabulary, learned to differentiate fact from fantasy, and was able to play with lexical relationships. David's oral language was strengthened by the literary experiences that were an integral part of his rearing. (Excerpts from the child's language are appended.) (HOD)

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On Becoming Literate: Early Socialization for Schooling

The Use of Literary Language

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If thou shalt bear sons and daughters...
purchase for them books according to the
best of your ability, and arrange to provide
a teacher for them at a tender age.

Babylonian Talmud

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Researchers, parents and teachers alike applaud the benefits of reading aloud to children and the value of fostering a literate home environment in the preschool years. As early as Huey (1908), the literature has been interspersed with recommendations to read aloud to children. Chomsky (1972) reports that access to books in the preschool years is associated with better school achievement. Despite this advocacy, there is a paucity of descriptive research focused on the developmental changes in children's interaction with books and their reading related behaviors.

There are several parent diaries that chronicle the parent-child interaction in book reading sessions (White, 1954; Butler, 1979; Graetz, 1971; Lowe, 1975; Saunders, 1976; Crago and Crago, 1976; Crago, M., 1975, 1978, 1979, 1980). Most of these have been published only in small pieces outside the American scholarly network. White (1954) and Butler (1979) are full-length longitudinal publications widely known among those interested in childrens literature. While the diaries are engaging and diverse, they all focus solely on the storyreading dyad itself as the underpinning of the literate preschooler.

This report is part of a larger study of my son, David, from ages 2:6 to 4:6. The focus of the larger study is on the emergence of literacy during these 2 preschool years (Hoffman, 1982). While I observed and recorded all storyreading and storytelling episodes on a daily basis in their natural setting for two years, I also recorded every other literacy event in my son's verbal and non-verbal communication. The data is

multifaceted and intertwined in such a way that David's story reading emerges as just one part, albeit important part, of the total literacy picture. Other literacy events include self-initiated literacy games, print and emergent writing, dramatization and role play, pretend reading, contextualized to decontextualized print, storytelling and re-telling, and his comments revealing metalinguistic awareness.

The data were collected in a handwritten diary on a day-and-night basis, on audio tapes and with collected artifacts. The data were then analyzed and categorized into three main categories and many subcategories. The first category, grouping book handling and pretend reading, I designated as "Reading-Wise" behaviors. Category two, including activities closely related to the reading ritual, I entitled "Book-Reading" behaviors. The third category called "Early Reading-Print" behaviors refers to the child's experiences with reading print and words (print for print's sake).

Because of the complexity of the original diary study, I will focus on one facet of the larger work. I will discuss and analyze David's literary language - his incorporation of written texts (children's literature) into his language and background of information in relation to his early socialization into his middle class home and values. (This category is entitled "Book-Reading" in the larger study.) (Hoffman, 1983) Intrinsic in these values is a strong literate environment and exposure - for the present and the future. Literacy is fostered in the preschooler in order to prepare him for a life as a literate

person in a literate environment.

One important feature of our bookreading was that at a very young age, David had developed a particular reading ritual. That is, during bookreadings, David and I sat in his bedroom alone; he chose his own books and placed them in a pile. We sat on his bed together, with David's head on my shoulder. Our sessions could not be interrupted by other members of the family. David did not want me to break the storyline with questions and discussion; if there were any interruptions, questions or discussion, they came from David, not from me.

David also controlled all of our readings with the discussion originating from him. He might request a book to be reread three times in full or in part or even backward. Unlike conventional school instruction, David did not want the flow of the story interrupted by me (the mother-teacher; parent-investigator). This gives us insight into the child-centered nature of David's reading ritual.

David was permitted and encouraged to choose his own books in the library, in the bookstore, and at home from his personal library of over 300 books which included many selections passed on to him by his older siblings. He usually chose books according to a current interest. Because of this self-selection and topic-centered reading, David became an active participant in the bookreading sessions. He had a keen interest in the subject matter or the genre and was quick to clarify points with questions. He was enticed into the world of books by his own interests and tastes.

I recorded David's responses both during and after bookreadings. He brought his own life to the books by interspersing the text of a storyline with everyday conversation; he asked questions of vocabulary; he brought his background of experiences into the reading of book genre and setting; and he was able to relate the texts to his own life situations. Outside of the bookreading dyad he used book vocabulary; he imitated literary syntax and story grammars; he related one text to another; he role-played and dramatized storyline characters; and he told and re-told stories.

From the hundreds of hours of bookreadings, David developed a distinct "literary" vocabulary even though he was still a non-reader himself. He seemed to be aware of some of the differences between oral and written language which is an important part of the process of learning to read. In many of the examples which I will demonstrate, we can see how he discovered the meanings of words as he incorporated book language into his daily conversation. David became aware of the special nature of written language and learned when and how to use these "book words" appropriately in his own oral language.

The following examples from my original diary illustrate how David lifted formulaic phrases from texts and employed them in his own play and narrative. In Example 1 David used the phrases "forever and always" and "live happily ever after" within his own play with me.

Example 1

David and I were kissing and hugging and I carried him down to the family room while kissing him. David said,
"Let's stay here forever and always and live happily ever after."
(David; Age 3:2)
From: The Rabbit's Wedding

In the example David was able to meaningfully incorporate a phrase from literature into his own experience.

In Example 2, David incorporated a formulaic phrase from a favorite book and then added his own opinion as fact.

Example 2

David's father was upstairs when he said, "Hey, do you hear that rain on the roof?" David said,
"Rain makes applesauce - it usually makes thunder though."
(David; 2:10)
From: Rain Makes Applesauce

In this example we can see how the word, "rain", triggered David's quotation from a much loved book. However, he then needed an addendum that showed something of his own experiences with rain and storms and hinted at his knowledge of the difference between fact and fantasy.

On other occasions, David used words from story texts within his own narratives. Sometimes he would even cite his source for the words; at other times he would let the words flow within his own conversation. In Example 3, we see where my use of the word, "magician", triggered a familiar passage from an often-read book. He informed me that there were no magicians with us, but that they were present at the time of King Pharoah.

Example 3

David wanted dinner faster than I could prepare it. I told him that he would just have to wait. Again he said,
"I want to eat right now."
I answered, "You must still think I'm a magician." He said,
"The magicians are with King Pharoah and not here!"
(David; Age 3:0)
From: Bible Tales for Young People

This example illustrates that David was beginning to sort out the meaning of the word "magician". He knew that they could not be in the kitchen with him and that they were present in the story of King Pharoah. He did not mention, however, magicians that he had seen on T.V. or at recent birthday parties.

In Example 4 David questions his father about the precise meaning of a simile that he had heard from a favorite storybook.

Example 4

David's father bought new shoe laces for David's shoes. The laces were black. David asked,
"Are these as black as ebony?"
(David; Age 3:11)
From: Snow White

David obviously knew that the color of his new laces was black. What he wanted clarified was whether the laces were "as black as ebony". These small excerpts note how David sharpened and refined his vocabulary through his experiences with books.

In Example 5 David uses a literary idiom within his conversation with full knowledge of its meaning.

Example 5

David and his father were outside taking a walk. David asked,
"Can't we have a bite to eat first? I want a bite to eat!"
(David; Age 3:6)
From: Stone Soup

In this example, David was able to take the meaning of a phrase he had been introduced to in a storybook, assimilate it, and then use it for his own purpose.

In addition to using book language, David also compared words across texts and played with the language from texts. He became so familiar with the contents of his books that he often compared words from one text with those of another text or played with the words of texts in a humorous, teasing way. For instance in Example 6, David compared a phrase from one book with the same phrase from another.

Example 6

I was reading The Story of Ping aloud to David and I read the words "rice cakes". David asked,
"Are the rice cakes like the rice cakes in Tikki Tikki Tembo?"
(David; Age 3:2)
From: The Story of Ping and Tikki Tikki Tembo

In this example David tested part of his frame of reference. His first association with "rice cakes" had been through the book "Tikki Tikki Tembo, and then his second association with the phrase was through the book The Story of Ping. Literature was his source of information concerning rice cakes and the vocabulary used to describe them; in this example he used his knowledge from one book as a frame of reference for another.

David's expanding awareness of multiple word meanings and usages is manifest in the following examples. Again, we see that he is developing and refining his vocabulary from books. In this case he even teases and jokingly pretends that he doesn't know the "other" meaning for the word.

Example 7

I read A Farm in which it says that plants are in a "nursery". David said with a smile,

"Nursery? Is it time for school now?"

"No", I answered. "Plants are in a nursery too."

David said,

"Oh, are they going to water all of the children in school to make them grow too? Ha ha ha ha ha..."

I said, "Oh, you're being so silly."

(David: Age 3:7)

From: A Farm

In this example, David indicated that he knew the multiple meanings of "nursery" well enough to be able to play with them and make a joke about their meanings.

David's delight and eagerness to use book language were evident in his daily conversation and play. Books were an important part of his background of information, his language and concept development, and fuel for his imagination. He took the language from books and assimilated it into his own life and conversation until it became his own. Yet, he seemed to know that books were books and real life was "the here and now". He played with the boundary between the fictional and real worlds. His linguistic play and role play added richness and diversity to his developing personality. He could "read" favorite words from texts, compare words from one text to another, analyze the meanings of words, and create puns with words. He enjoyed teasing, playing tricks and jokes, and actively giving information during bookreadings. All of these point to the important role of literature in his early language learning.

In order to live the lives of his book characters, David role played and dramatized from the texts throughout his natural day of play. At times he merely dressed as a book character and

went about his daily business. On other occasions he pretended to be a book character and brought book language and genre into his play. At still other times, he formally dramatized a story by giving out roles, directing and using props. David actively lived the stories from his books throughout the study. I recorded this area of role play and dramatization with the same persistence during the entire study. Witness the following examples which were taken over time.

Example 8

David was playing with his loaded wagon. I asked, "Do you think you can pull that heavy load all the way to the other room?" David answered,

> "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can, I think I can, ..."

until he got into the other room. Then he shouted back,

> "I thought I could, I thought I could, I thought I could, I thought I could."
> (David; Age 2:6)
> From: *The Little Engine That Could*

Example 9

David and I were alone and I made him instant hot oatmeal for breakfast. He said,

> "This is too hot. Let's leave it here, dear, and go for a walk in the woods."
> (David; Age 2:7)
> From: *The Three Bears*

In the following example, David announces who he is portraying and then continues with his role play.

Example 10

During dinner, David butted his head into his father's chest. It hurt his father and he said, "Hey, that hurts!" David answered,

> "I'm Brer Rabbit and you're the tar baby and that's what Brer Rabbit does to the tar baby!"
> (David; Age 3:1)
> From: *The Tar Baby*

While the previous examples are representative of David's role play of book characters and mini-dramatizations of story excerpts, the following example represents David's dramatization, direction and production of a full story.

Example 11

D. = David
J. = Jerry, Father

D. - Once upon a time (pause) there was three Billy Goats Gruff. Gruff. They were going up to the hillside to get more grass and they had to cross a bridge. And under the bridge was a (louder) great, big, ugly, mean, bad troll. (pause) And the first (whispering) Billy Goat, a little baby Billy Goat went over to the hillside.

J. - (Gruffly) Who's that walking over my bridge?

D. - (Squeaking) The Little Billy Goat Gruff.

J. - (Gruffly) Stop right there! I'm going to eat you up.

D. - (Squeaking) No. Wait for my bigger brother!

J. - Okay. Be off with you.

D. - (Squeaking) Thank you! Trip, trap! (louder) Trip, trap!

J. - (Gruffly) Who is that walking over my bridge?

D. - (Louder) The Middle Sized Brother.

J. - (Gruffly) Well, stop! I'm going to eat you up!

D. - (Louder) Wait 'til my big, BIG brother comes.

J. - Okay, be off with you.

D. - Trip! Trap! Trip! Trap! Trip! Trap!

J. - (Gruffly) Who's that walking over my bridge?

D. - (Very loudly) It is the BIG one! Ha! Ha! Ha!

J. - (Gruffly) Well, stop right there. I'm going to eat you up.

D. - (Very loudly) You're going to eat me up? I'm going to send you down. (pause) Chhhh! Chhhh!

J. - Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh! (Pause)

J. - Well, finish the story.

D. - Now...The big Billy Goat Gruff sent the ugly, mean, bad troll down. Snip, snap, snout, this tale is told out.
(David; Age 3:0) Tape 1. page 5

In these role play and dramatization examples we can see how David operationalized the books that were read to him. He took the language and content of the books in making literature a part of his life.

In contrast to experimental studies, my study is based upon naturalistic readings of children's books in my home as opposed to a laboratory setting. I observed and recorded data for two years on a day and night basis rather than isolated single sessions with experimenters.

In order to understand how children become readers, it is important to look at young children's early literary experiences and the influence of bookreading on their lives. This study attempts to describe the bookreading orientation of one child in one particular kind of literate home environment. David's development of early language was enriched by literature. He learned multiple meanings of words, refined meanings of others, built a "literary" vocabulary, learned to differentiate fact from fantasy, and was able to play with lexical relationships. David's oral language was strengthened by the literary experiences that were an integral part of his child-rearing. Moreover, the patterns of his book behavior were evidence for his self-selection of books and his control of the reading sessions. I included examples from the original diary here primarily to

acquaint you with the rich and meaningful detail involved in this type of naturalistic study.

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READING RELATED BEHAVIORS

THREE CATEGORIES FOR ANALYSIS

I. "Reading-wise" Behaviors

Book Handling (Holding, Pages and Print)

Pretend Reading (Reading Along, Reading Alone, Reading Registers)

Print Tracks Sound

Life Attachment

II. Book Reading Behaviors

Setting and Selection

Vocabulary

Interaction of Text ←---→ Life

III. Early Reading-Print Behaviors

Child Questions Print Settings

Child Evidences Development

Child Manipulates Print

Taken from: "On Becoming Literate: Early Socialization for Schooling"

Dr. Sandra Josephs Hoffman

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(David; Age 3:0) Tape 1. page 5